



**TESTIMONY OF SANDRA B. JOHNSON, EDP
VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
METROHARTFORD ALLIANCE
STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 925: *AAC Bradley International
Airport and Economic Development*
COMMERCE COMMITTEE
February 17th, 2011**

Good afternoon, Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger and members of the Committee. I come before you today to request your endorsement for greater autonomy for composition and responsibility of the Bradley International Board of Directors.

My name is Sandra Johnson and I am Vice President and Director of Business Development, domestic and international, for the MetroHartford Alliance. The Alliance is the Hartford region's lead economic development organization and the only fully accredited economic development organization in the State. I lead the business recruitment, retention and expansion efforts for the Hartford Region and sit on the Bradley Development League.

With a focus on creating jobs, retaining and attracting talent and attracting capital investment to the region and State, we need to be maximizing every asset. As an economic developer, I see Bradley International is one of our strongest, underleveraged assets. Today we can witness where our global economic reset has created some winners and some losers. Businesses that are nimble and able to be responsive to markets and conditions have been successful. Bradley International also needs to be nimble to fully achieve its potential and successfully compete with other airports.

There is a new term developing – aerotropolis. Where rail hubs once created the centers of commerce and development, airports are now being viewed as the 21st century equivalent, further amping up our competition. We appeal to you, our legislators to embrace that vision and provide Bradley with every opportunity to open the door to greater business opportunity for our State and region.

Overall, our investors that include health care providers, institutions of higher education, regional municipalities and businesses of all sizes, are very supportive of Bradley Airport being a robust airport system, and we recognize the tremendous value and potential of

having an international airport located in our region. In fact, at a time when resources are so constrained, we must enhance and leverage existing economic drivers such as Bradley Airport. First, it needs to be said that we applaud the outstanding Department of Transportation staff that perform the airport's runway and facilities maintenance every day. However, this legislative proposal specifically addresses the governance of the airport, and we agree that it is important to consider whether the current governing structure enhances the airport's ability to grow and stimulate economic development in our region or not.

For example, providing the Bradley Board of Directors more autonomy could facilitate hiring decisions regarding staff at the airport including setting appropriate compensation and would also give the Board greater control over the airport's budget for marketing and route development. As a result, the Board would determine how and when all airport staff are approved for travel for route development and marketing purposes.

Such autonomy would put Bradley on par with other states' privately-owned and operated airports, with whom we are competing for direct flights and international service. Those airports have direct control over their marketing dollars and, therefore, greater flexibility assembling the incentive packages that are critical to attract new airlines. Bradley is at a disadvantage and has potentially missed out on opportunities to grow based on this lack of autonomy. We lost our one transatlantic flight due to the steep rise in fuel costs although it demonstrated market demand. Had Bradley been more nimble, could there have been a better opportunity to preserve the flight? Maybe.

Given the enormous obstacles Connecticut faces to job retention and growth, it is critical that we focus on legislation that is low cost and high impact with regard to long-term economic development. Senate Bill 925 is an example of legislation that will promote business development and, therefore, long-term job growth.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sandra B. Johnson, EDP

Vice President and Director of Business Development